Jefferson's historic call for ''decent respect,'' his assertion that ''all men are created equal,'' form the cornerstones of modern democracies. On this 232d anniversary, we should reflect that these goals are works in progress, and that much more needs to be done here and abroad to attain them.

While the Declaration speaks about all men being created equal, what about women, who didn't get the right to vote until 1919, or slaves who were owned by Washington and Jefferson? What of the phrase separate but equal, from the Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson, which defined the rights of so many African Americans until 1954?

The United States is challenged today by world opinion that we do not accord ''decent respect'' to human rights by ''enhanced interrogation,'' denial of due process at Guantanamo, and failure to observe the Geneva Conventions. We make mistakes. We acknowledge them. We correct them.

The work in progress continues. Our judicial system invalidates executive excesses. Our First Amendment rights, due process of law, and separation of powers take time, but they remain the universal gold standard. Our current congressional agenda contains initiatives to expand civil-rights legislation; it is likely to be enacted soon to reverse the Supreme Court decision limiting women's rights to sue for equal employment opportunities.

The work started here in Philadelphia with the Declaration of Independence, leading to our magnificent Constitution.

U.S. SEN. ARLEN SPECTER, (R., Pa.)

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES RULE

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court carefully crafted the Roe v. Wade decision to serve as the balanced foundation on which the reproductive rights of women could rest. Now, in 2008, the Bush administration is making a late-stage power grab based on a foundation of flawed ideology.

A flawed ideology that has the potential to harm millions of American women.

Today, I join many of my colleagues in telling this administration that their ideology has no place in the health care system that American women depend upon.

Last week, it came to my attention that the Department of Health and Human Services is circulating a draft regulation that would jeopardize the reproductive health of women and their fundamental freedom of choice.

Studies show that the use of family planning reduces the probability of a woman having an abortion by 85 percent. But this rule could severely limit a woman's access to these family planning resources by adopting an alarmingly broad definition for the term ''abortion.''

This definition would allow health care professionals to classify contraceptives like birth control pills, intrauterine devices, IUDs, and emergency contraceptives as ''abortions.'' Based on this classification, health care professions could refuse access for women who need these resources.

As such, this proposal would greatly increase the chances of women encountering hospital and clinic staff who would prevent them from receiving the information they need to make thoughtful, personal decisions about their health, and may even refuse to write prescriptions for basic birth control.

Fundamentally, this Bush administration proposal undermines everything we have worked to achieve in the last 35 years.

It could endanger access to birth control and upend the federal title X family planning program. In 2006 alone, title X provided family planning services to approximately 5 million women and men through a network of more than 4,400 community-based clinics.

It could endanger State laws and regulations like the one in my State that require equitable coverage for contraceptives under insurance plans that cover other prescriptions.

And it could even endanger a sexual assault or rape victim's access to emergency contraception in a hospital emergency room. An unimaginable thought for the millions of American women every year who turn to emergency contraceptives following a traumatic event in their lives.

Seventy-six percent of voters strongly support doing everything we can to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies through commonsense measures.

This is an assault on a common goal of preventing unintended pregnancies and reducing the number of abortions in this country.

And it is unacceptable.

For the millions of women across this Nation, I strongly urge this administration to reconsider their stance and put reproductive health above partisan politics and ideology.

VETERAN VOTING SUPPORT ACT OF 2008

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, yesterday I introduced Senate bill S. 3308, the Veteran Voting Support Act of 2008, with Senator KERRY, and our cosponsors: Senators REID, OBAMA, SCHUMER, LEAHY, CLINTON, MURRAY and WYDEN.

This is a simple, straightforward bill that shows our veterans the respect that they deserve. They have supported our nation, some at great risk and sacrifice. If the government is providing services, veterans should receive every opportunity to voice their vote.

More than a year ago, I learned of a controversy that emerged in California—where the Department of Veterans Affairs had been fighting since 2004 to bar voter registration services at a VA facility. Over the last 16 months, we have tried to encourage the VA to establish a fair, nonpartisan, standard policy that provides the best available support to veterans served by VA facilities.

The answers I received from the VA have been conflicting. First, the VA stated that they considered the possibility of following the National Voter Registration Act—but then determined it would be too costly. Given the only resources needed is a photocopy of a voter registration form, I find that hard to believe.

Then this year, Senator KERRY and I had exchanged multiple letters on this issue with the VA. The response then changed. VA officials asserted that they believed that providing support or allowing groups would violate the Hatch Act.

The Hatch Act is a prohibition of partisan political activities conducted by Federal employees, on official time. It has not been interpreted to include nonpartisan voter registration by the Office of Special Counsel, which interprets the Hatch Act. Furthermore, the veterans served by VA facilities are generally not Federal employees.

The VA then argued that nonpartisan voter registration services would cause ''disruptions to facility operations.''

That claim is even more dubious. Unless ''Rock the Vote'' comes to VA facilities, voter registration drives are about as tame an activity as you can get.

The circumstances in this situation raise great concern. Our country faces issues of war and peace, challenges in foreign relations, and serious questions as to the treatment of our veteran population.

The most recent Census data we have—from a 2005 report—indicates that more than 20 percent of our veterans are not registered to vote. That means that almost 5 million veterans do not have an opportunity to cast their ballots.

The VA runs a massive program to assist our veterans to heal, as well as ensure that they thrive on their return from military service.

This is true whether the veteran is recently discharged for tours in Iraq, or served in World War II.

A recent report characterized the VA's services as including ''a 'safety net' for the many lower-income veterans who have come to depend on it.''

The question has emerged: Will this make the right kind of impact? Will this cause more veterans to be registered? The VA serves large numbers of veterans—in a variety of care facilities.

For example, the Veterans Health Administration operates 155 medical centers, 135 nursing homes, 717 ambulatory care and clinic facilities; 45 residential rehabilitation treatment programs, and 209 vet centers.

In total, there are 1,261 total facilities; where as many as 5 million veterans who are not registered to vote may use each year. That strikes me as a critical need unmet.

And it is a rational step for the government to make.

The National Voter Registration Act requires at least as much—if not more—from the States. Every State social service agency and motor vehicle agency is required to assist persons who use their agencies.

That is a mandate from the Federal Government to the States to register voters.

In the law, the Federal Government may choose to assist people to register to vote if the State requests NVRA designation and the agency accepts.

Immediately after the legislation was passed, then-President Clinton issued Executive Order 12926—which has not been rescinded by the current administration. That Executive order calls on all Federal agencies, ''to the greatest extent practicable'' to provide both voter registration information, and voter registration forms.

Some might claim that this legislation is premature—that under the scheme of the act, the State must request the Federal Government's involvement. Well, that has already occurred.

Several States, including my home State of California, under the leadership of Secretary Bowen, have asked that the VA designate the facilities within their States.

All three have been refused by this Department.

Ten secretaries of State—from both parties—have requested that the VA reverse its directive. Still no change.

In the case of Connecticut, secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz defied the VA's directive and attempted to gain entry to the West Haven VA facility.

There, she intended on providing nonpartisan voter registration services, as well as showing veterans how to use the new disabled-access voting systems.

Guess what. She was turned away at the door because of this new directive.

As she was standing outside the door to the VA facility, she met a 91-year-old gentleman, a veteran of World War II. Secretary Bysiewicz asked him if he would like to be registered to vote, and he said that he would.

After registering, he made the comment that ''I wanted to do this last year—but there was no-one there to help me.'' That is wholly unacceptable.

When we hear of why so many veterans express pride in their service and their sacrifice, we hear the phrase ''protecting the American way of life'' again and again.

At the cornerstone of our democracy is that every eligible citizen should be registered and receive their chance to cast their vote.

After many months of trying to work out a meaningful solution with the Department, I believe it is time the VA provides veterans the support they deserve to register, cast their vote, and have that vote counted.

This is why we are introduced the Veteran Voting Support Act of 2008. This legislation would: Require the VA to make voter registration services available at VA facilities in states that request it, in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act. These services include voter registration forms, answers to questions on registration issues and assistance with submitting voter registration forms. Those services are available to veterans using VA facilities.

Require the VA to assist veterans at facilities to receive and fill out absentee ballots if they choose to vote by absentee.

Allow nonpartisan groups and election officials to provide nonpartisan voter information and registration services to veterans.

Require an annual report to Congress from the Department of Veterans Affairs on progress related to this legislation.

I hope that my colleagues are willing to support this effort to reverse an overly bureaucratic and irrational burden at the VA.

Passage of this bill would recognize the long history in our country of nonpartisan and civil rights groups that have helped register those who have the greatest need for assistance.

And it respects election officials have long worked to register all eligible voters and provide them with the information and tools to cast a ballot.

I hope my colleagues join me in supporting S. 3308, the Veterans Voting Support Act of 2008.

VETERANS PRIVACY AND DATA SECURITY

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, technology continues to affect both the strengths and the vulnerabilities of Government. Advances over the past decades in computer technology have enabled us to generate and access unprecedented amounts of data, and make information easily accessible to citizens as well as Government employees seeking to assist them. Technology allows information to travel from one coast to the other in the blink of an eye, offering the possibility that as technology improves so will the efficiency of Government.

Unfortunately, the possibilities of the information age include an increased risk of data theft. According to the Identity Theft Resource Center, identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America. As we learned in 2006 with the theft of a Department of Veterans Affairs' laptop, which put into question the security of the personal information of 26.5 million veterans, neither Government Departments nor the people who rely on them are immune to these new and changing risks.

In response to the VA computer theft, I, along with a number of my colleagues in the Senate and the House, requested the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study to determine whether existing privacy laws and guidance were adequate to protect the Federal Government's collection and use of personal information. Last month, GAO reported back to Congress, and recommended we consider revising existing Federal privacy laws. Following a June 18, 2008, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing on this and other matters related to privacy security, I joined committee Chairman JOE LIEBERMAN and Ranking Member SUSAN COLLINS in calling for changes to modernize the Privacy Act.

The Privacy Act of 1974 is the foundation of the Federal Government's privacy protection law. While this act provides a worthwhile basis for the protection of privacy, it was written in a different time when the Government faced different challenges. Mr. President, 1974 does not seem that long ago, but it was well before the emergence of many computer technologies that have changed the demands of data security. At that time, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs were unknown, Apple and Microsoft were little more than ideas, and neither laptops nor the Internet were part of the common American experience. The technological changes that have occurred since 1974, while bringing new opportunities, have also brought new challenges to the security of our privacy and safety of the personal information that is kept by the Federal Government. As technology changes, we need to continue to adapt the framework of Federal data security laws, as we began to do in 2002 with the E-Government Act.

As chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I know the Department of Veterans Affairs still has a long way to go towards establishing and securing the personal information of veterans. VA and several other Departments received an ''F'' on this year's Federal Information Security Management Act—FISMA—report card. I do not doubt that VA recognizes this is a problem, and I am pleased by the Department's recent move to streamline its information technology management structure. Still, good intentions provide little comfort or security to a veteran whose identity is potentially placed at risk because VA failed to put adequate policies and procedures in place to protect personal information. I expect VA to rapidly take the steps necessary to achieve a passing FISMA grade, so that veterans can have confidence in the Department's ability to protect their personal information. Technology should serve its intended purpose of helping, not harming, those who rely on the efficiencies it provides. I also look forward to Congress taking action to create privacy laws which meet the demands of 21st century technology.

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF INTEGRATION OF THE ARMED FORCES

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, today we recognize the 60th anniversary of one of the momentous steps forward for equality of opportunity in our Nation's history. On July 26, 1948, President Harry Truman, signed Executive Order 9981. That order read, in part:

there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.